

POLICY POINTS

➤ POLICY POINTS BRINGS RELEVANT DATA TO TIMELY PUBLIC POLICY ISSUES IN ARIZONA

Closing the Achievement Gap for Students with a Home Language Other than English

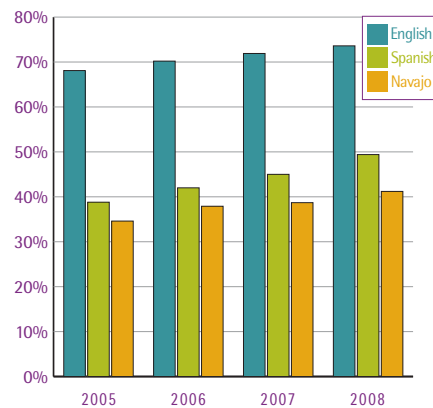
The differences in student achievement by language proficiency are a contentious policy issue in Arizona. The lagging performance of Arizona's English Language Learners (ELLs) is the basis of an ongoing lawsuit (*Nogales v Horne*) in which plaintiffs are seeking adequate resources for ELL students to meet the state's academic standards. This issue of Policy Points presents new findings to help policy makers and the public better understand the academic standing of Arizona's "non-English home language students."¹ These are students with a self-reported home language other than English on district information forms.

Spanish is the most common non-English home language among Arizona students. In 2008, nearly 22% of Arizona Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) test participants reported Spanish as their home language. After Spanish, the incidence of other languages drops sharply. A total of 1% of students spoke Navajo, the second most common non-English home language, and only 0.3% spoke Vietnamese, the third most common. From 2005 to 2008, more than half of Arizona's non-English home language students did not pass AIMS, while their English home language peers performed notably better.

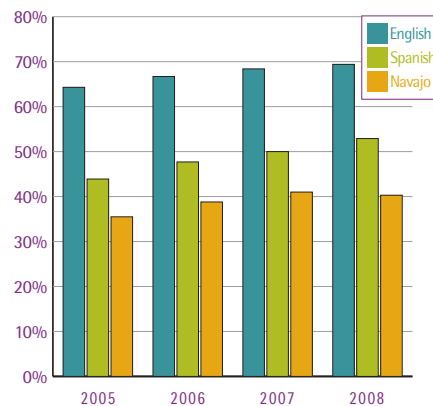
For many non-English home language students, limited exposure to English at home may mean they face additional challenges to meet Arizona's academic standards. However, it is important to note that while living in a non-English dominant household often correlates with limited English proficiency, that is not always the case. These students span the continuum from ELL to bilingual.

The academic gap between non-English home language students and English home language students has persisted over the past four years examined here; however, the gap is narrowing. Since 2005, the AIMS pass rates for all students have generally increased with the pass rate of Spanish or Navajo home language students rising at a greater rate than English home language students.

AIMS Pass Rate by Home Language, All Grades (Reading)



AIMS Pass Rate by Home Language, All Grades (Math)



Source: Arizona Department of Education, original analysis.



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Arizona Indicators is an online information resource and analysis tool that centralizes data about the state and its communities. Arizona Indicators presents interactive visualizations, clear data descriptions, and public opinion data in a broad range of content areas.

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¹ This home language identifier does not provide enough information to know whether a student is bilingual or an English Language Learner (ELL). However, home language is still a significant identifier because it plays a role in student academic performance.

- In reading, the annual pass rate of Spanish home language students continues to increase at a higher rate than English home language students.
- The pass rate of Navajo home language students also increased at a higher rate than English home language students with the exception of a decline in 2008 mathematics.

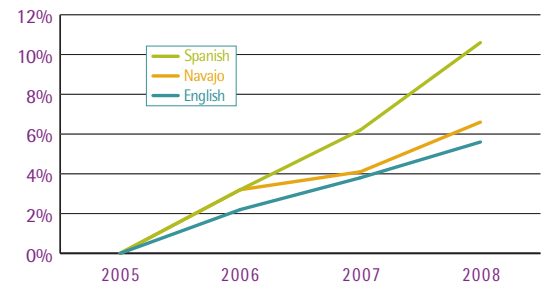
Non-English home language students are catching up. But, as the trend lines illustrate, non-English home language students are not on track to achieve parity in the foreseeable future. This illustrates why language acquisition continues to be one of the most critical issues facing Arizona.

What is the academic performance of Arizona public schools with the most non-English home language students? The high schools with the largest population of Spanish home language students are located in Maricopa County and along the Arizona-Mexico border. In 2001, the AIMS pass rate for Spanish home language students at these schools was relatively low. There are notable standouts, however, such as Nogales and North high schools. Despite the generally subpar AIMS pass rates, all of the schools received a favorable rating according to AZLEARNs, Arizona's current school accountability system. This discrepancy is possible because the AZLEARNs formula for high schools is calculated based on multiple factors, including: the percent of all students who pass AIMS, dropout rate, graduation rate, and performance on the English language proficiency test. When evaluating school academic performance, it is important to consider AIMS pass rates, AZLEARNs designations, and additional factors such as how well high schools prepare students for college.

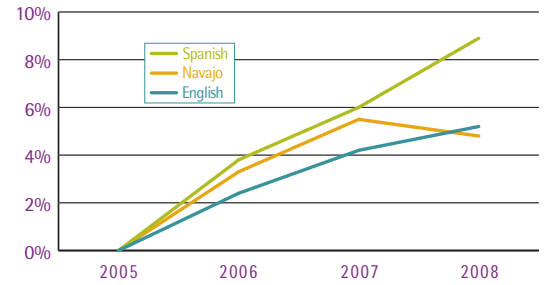
The high schools with the largest populations of Navajo home language students are located on or near Indian reservations in northern Arizona. The AIMS pass rates of Navajo home language high school students were low, but all of these high schools fared well on AZLEARNs. Flagstaff and Sinagua high schools, both non-reservation schools, are noteworthy for both high AIMS pass rates and for receiving two of the highest AZLEARNs labels possible.

Regardless of how you measure it, non-English home language students are generally at an academic disadvantage in our current education system. The good news is that the AIMS achievement gap is narrowing. The bad news is that progress is slow and we need all of our children ready to meet the demands of an increasingly competitive workforce. These data highlight the need to revisit education policy options that will give non-English home language students the greatest opportunity for success.

Annual Increase of AIMS Pass Rate-Reading



Annual Increase of AIMS Pass Rate-Math



Source: Arizona Department of Education, original analysis.

Academic Performance of Top 10 High Schools by Number of Spanish Home Language Students, 2008

School	High School District	Students	Pass Rate		AZLEARNs
			Reading	Math	
San Luis High School	Yuma Union	1,208	43%	38%	Performing
Trevor Browne High School	Phoenix Union	928	45%	42%	Performing
Alhambra High School	Phoenix Union	903	44%	43%	Performing
Maryvale High School	Phoenix Union	899	52%	46%	Performing
Carl Hayden High School	Phoenix Union	898	42%	44%	Performing
Kofa High School	Yuma Union	692	49%	44%	Performing
Yuma High School	Yuma Union	671	49%	36%	Performing
North High School	Phoenix Union	654	58%	55%	Performing
Camelback High School	Phoenix Union	623	47%	43%	Performing
Nogales High School	Nogales Unified	587	58%	53%	Performing Plus

Academic Performance of Top 10 High Schools by Number of Navajo Home Language Students, 2008

School	High School District	Students	Pass Rate		AZLEARNs
			Reading	Math	
Chinle High School	Chinle Unified	329	27%	26%	Performing
Monument Valley High School	Kayenta Unified	308	46%	31%	Performing
Tuba City High School	Tuba City Unified	262	42%	36%	Performing
Pinon High School	Pinon Unified	242	37%	34%	Performing
Window Rock High School	Window Rock Unified	106	39%	35%	Performing
Ganado High School	Ganado Unified	96	40%	37%	Performing
Cocconino High School	Flagstaff Unified	89	60%	53%	Performing
Page High School	Page Unified	85	52%	54%	Performing
Flagstaff High School	Flagstaff Unified	71	80%	73%	Excelling
Sinagua High School	Flagstaff Unified	69	76%	67%	Highly Performing

Note: The student count is the median number of students across all subjects that took AIMS at the 10th grade level.
Source: Arizona Department of Education.